

Chapter 1

Project Purpose and Background

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 Why a Decision is Needed

Northwest Aggregates, a wholly-owned subsidiary of Lone Star Northwest, has submitted a request to King County to significantly increase mining over current levels at its Maury Island sand and gravel mine. King County issued a Determination of Significance (DS) for the proposal on August 11, 1998, based on its review of the project grading plan and environmental checklist dated May 1998 (this checklist is available for review at the Vashon library). The DS documented the County's determination that significant environmental impacts could result from the proposal and an EIS is required. This EIS is being prepared to meet the requirements of the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), per Washington Administrative Code, Chapter 197-11.

1.1.2 The SEPA Process

SEPA requires that King County disclose and consider the environmental impacts of their actions. The County action in this case is the revision of an existing Grading Permit. The process began with a request for public comments and with a public scoping meeting held on Vashon Island in September 1998. King County participated in additional public meetings held on Vashon Island in January, February, and June 1999 to discuss issues related to the EIS.

This Draft Environmental Impact Statement (Draft EIS) addresses these public concerns as well as other issues identified by the EIS analysis team. The public, regulatory agencies, public interest groups, and other organizations, will have an opportunity to critique and comment on this Draft EIS (WAC 197-11, part 5), and King County will then respond to these comments in a Final EIS. After the Final EIS is published, King County Department of

Development and Environmental Services will make a decision to approve, condition, or deny the applicant's proposal.

1.1.3 Who is Preparing this EIS and Making the Decision

King County Department of Development and Environmental Services (DDES) is the lead agency under SEPA.

Jones & Stokes Associates, an environmental consulting firm, is responsible for conducting and documenting the environmental analysis for this EIS. They are acting as a third-party reviewer, which means that they work for and under the direction of King County, rather than for the applicant.

1.2 Overview of Applicant's Proposal

The King County Comprehensive Plan designates the property as a mining site and Lone Star Northwest is currently permitted to extract sand and gravel from the site. However, for the past 20 years, the site has been mined at relatively low levels to supply local markets on Vashon and Maury Islands (between 10,000 and 20,000 tons per year). Prior to that time, offsite barge deliveries to sites such as Indian Island and various piers within the Port of Seattle waterfront had resulted in mineral extraction levels as high as approximately 1.3 million cubic yards.

The operator now wishes to significantly increase mining at the site and to resume barging materials off the site using the existing dock. The applicant's purpose and need for this project is to meet the anticipated high market demand for sand and structural fills (materials which are abundant on the site). While the applicant operates several mines in the region, the Maury Island site contains a high amount of quality fills, products that are not as abundant at other sites operated by the applicant.

Specifically, Lone Star Northwest wishes to increase its maximum production rate at Maury Island from roughly 10,000 tons per year (the level of production that has occurred in recent years) to up to 7.5 million tons per year (that is, 5.5 million cubic yards).

1.2.1 Other Permits Required for the Applicant's Proposal

The applicant also wishes to revise and upgrade their existing Surface Mining Reclamation Permit, which was issued by the Washington State Department of Natural Resources (DNR), in accordance with the 1993 amendments to the state's Surface Mining Act (Revised Code of Washington Chapter 78.44). The Act recognizes that, while surface mining is an essential activity, thorough reclamation of mined lands is necessary to prevent damage to the environment. Lone Star Northwest has submitted a preliminary reclamation plan to DNR, according to the requirements of the Surface Mining Act.

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers has indicated that an individual permit will be required for repair of the dock, under Section 10 of the Rivers and Harbors Act. A permit under Section 404 of the Clean Water Act would also be required for work on the dock because the shoreline is a designated wetland.

In addition, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and National Marine Fisheries Service would be required to comply with Section 7 of the Endangered Species Act.

Finally, King County has determined that this proposal requires a Shorelines Substantial Development Permit for dock and conveyor repairs.

1.2.2 Existing Permits

Mining on the site is currently conducted under a Grading Permit from King County, Permit No. 1128-714 (April 1997), and a Surface Mining Reclamation Permit from the Washington State DNR, Permit No. 70-010256 (1971). Current operations are also covered by a Determination of Non-Significance issued by King County in 1977. These approvals, along with an Aquatic Lands Lease from DNR, permit mining, processing, and reclamation activity on approximately 193 acres of the 235-acre site.

1.2.3 How Mitigation is Addressed in this EIS

Mitigation includes measures to reduce or avoid a particular impact. Mitigation can occur in several ways, including:

- *Minimizing the impact* by limiting the project, using technology, or taking affirmative steps to avoid or reduce impacts;
- *Rectifying the impact* by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment;
- *Reducing or eliminating the impact over time* by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action;
- *Compensating for the impact* by replacing, enhancing, or providing substitute resources or environments; and/or
- *Monitoring the impact and taking appropriate corrective measures.*

In this EIS, four forms of mitigation are evaluated. First, the two action alternatives evaluated in this EIS examine lower levels of bargaining to determine how such reductions might mitigate adverse effects of the proposal. These alternatives were developed in response to public comment and internal evaluation of the proposal, as King County was determining the scope of the EIS.

The second and third types of mitigation evaluated in this EIS are already assumed to be applied to the project and were factored in to the environmental analysis of each alternative. These two types of measures include (1) those which the applicant has already proposed in response to known environmental issues regarding mining at the project site, and (2) those which are standard requirements of existing regulations, such as requirements stipulated by the King County Code. Collectively, these two types of mitigation measures are described in each chapter of this EIS as “Measures Already Proposed by the Applicant or Required by Regulation.”

The fourth and final type of mitigation includes potential measures which may be applied to the Grading Permit by King County through the County’s discretionary authority under SEPA. These measures were not factored into the impact analysis but were developed following the analysis to identify possible ways to reduce impacts or public concerns. These measures are neither required nor proposed by the applicant, but are presented for the

consideration of the public, the regulatory agencies, and King County. King County may require some or all of these measures, or may require additional measures based on their review and on public and agency comments. These potential measures are described in each chapter of this EIS as “Additional Measures for Consideration to Further Reduce Impacts.”

1.3 Existing Site Characteristics

The roughly 235-acre site proposed for continued mining activities is located in portions of Sections 28 and 29, Township 22N, Range 3E, on the eastern edge of Maury Island next to Vashon Island and along the East Passage (Figures 1-1 through 1-5).

The following sections describe the property being proposed for mining. Additional detail about site conditions is provided in the first sections of Chapters 3 through 12.

1.3.1 Geology/Mineral Resources

The site contains mostly sand and some gravel in a deposit referred to as Vashon Advance Outwash. These deposits make ideal structural fill for construction projects. It is estimated that the site contains a Vashon Advance Outwash deposit of approximately 85 million tons. This is equivalent to 63 million cubic yards.

1.3.2 Topography

The site generally slopes from northwest to southeast toward Puget Sound. The upper northern, western, and southwestern portions of the site are generally rolling with slope gradients ranging from approximately 5 to 20 percent. From these upper portions of the site, topography drops sharply to form bluffs with slope gradients ranging from approximately 60 to 80 percent. Two excavations (mining pits) from historic mining activities are present in the bluffs. These areas total 40 acres of disturbed area, of which 9 acres are currently being mined. Slopes along excavated areas range from about 60 percent to near vertical. Total elevation change across the site is about 360 feet.

1.3.3 Vegetation

The site contains several upland plant communities, including mixed madrone/Douglas fir forests, madrone woodlands, mixed alder and willow thickets, mixed grasses, and shrubs. The site also contains approximately 9 acres of bare ground related to the current mining operation. Portions of the previously mined areas now have vegetation growing on them, much of which is Scot's broom and other non-native or weedy species. No wetland vegetation is located on the site. Patches of eelgrass are present landward of the barge loading dock.

1.3.4 Land Use Designations and Zoning

The site is designated "Mining" on the 1994 King County Comprehensive Plan Land Use Map, and is also identified as a "Designated Mineral Resources Site" on the 1994 King County Comprehensive Plan Mineral Resources Map. The site is currently zoned Mineral Resources (M) (potential RA-2.5) by the King County Zoning Code (Title 21A).

1.3.5 Site Access and Utilities

Access to the site is provided from two private driveways from Southwest 260th Street.

Electricity is currently used to power the portable equipment occasionally used on the site. No other utilities, including water or sewer, serve the site.

1.4 Past and Current Mining Activity

Approximately 40 acres of the site have been disturbed by previous mining activities, approximately 9 acres of which is currently in active mining. The intensity of mining at the site has varied according to market conditions.

Sand and gravel have been mined from the site since the 1940s. Lone Star Northwest, or its predecessors, has been mining the site since the late 1960s, with some relatively intense periods of mining in the early 1970s to provide fill for major construction projects, such as Terminal 37 and Piers 25, 86, and 115 of the Port of Seattle.

In 1971, the site (then owned by Pioneer Sand & Gravel) was the largest of four gravel pits on the southeastern coast of Maury Island. Over 4 million cubic yards of fill were extracted from the site for the construction of shipping piers and terminals along the Seattle waterfront and at Indian Island. Annual extraction levels were as high as 1.3 million cubic yards. During these past operations, bulldozers were used to push the sand and gravel downslope, into a series of tunnels and conveyor belts, and then onto barges (similar to the operations now being proposed by Lone Star Northwest). (Port of Seattle 1971.)

1.5 Citations

Port of Seattle. 1971. Sand and gravel play major role in construction. Port of Seattle Reporter. July.

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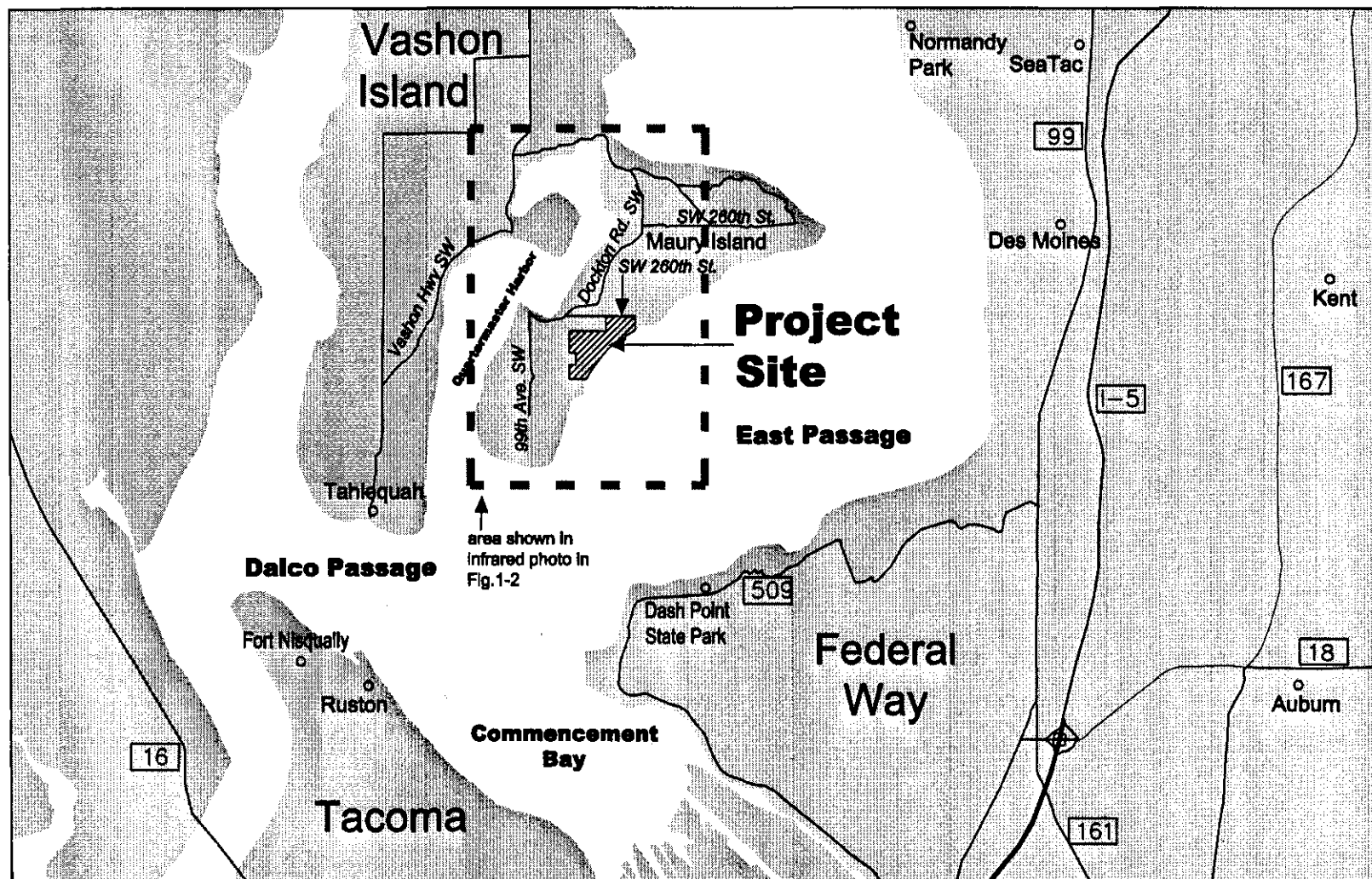


Figure 1-1. Vicinity Map of Southern Puget Sound

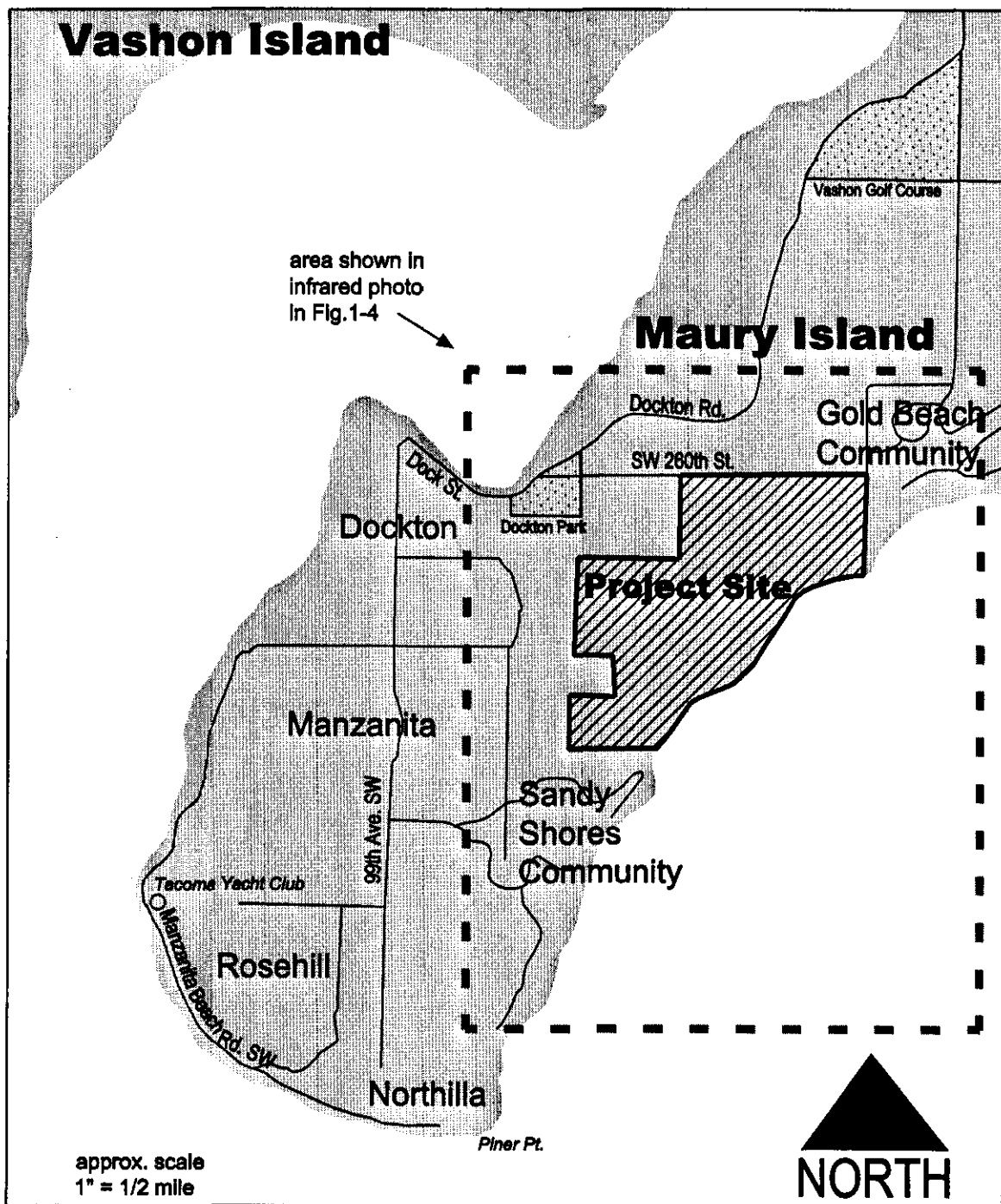


Figure 1-3. Vicinity Map of Maury Island

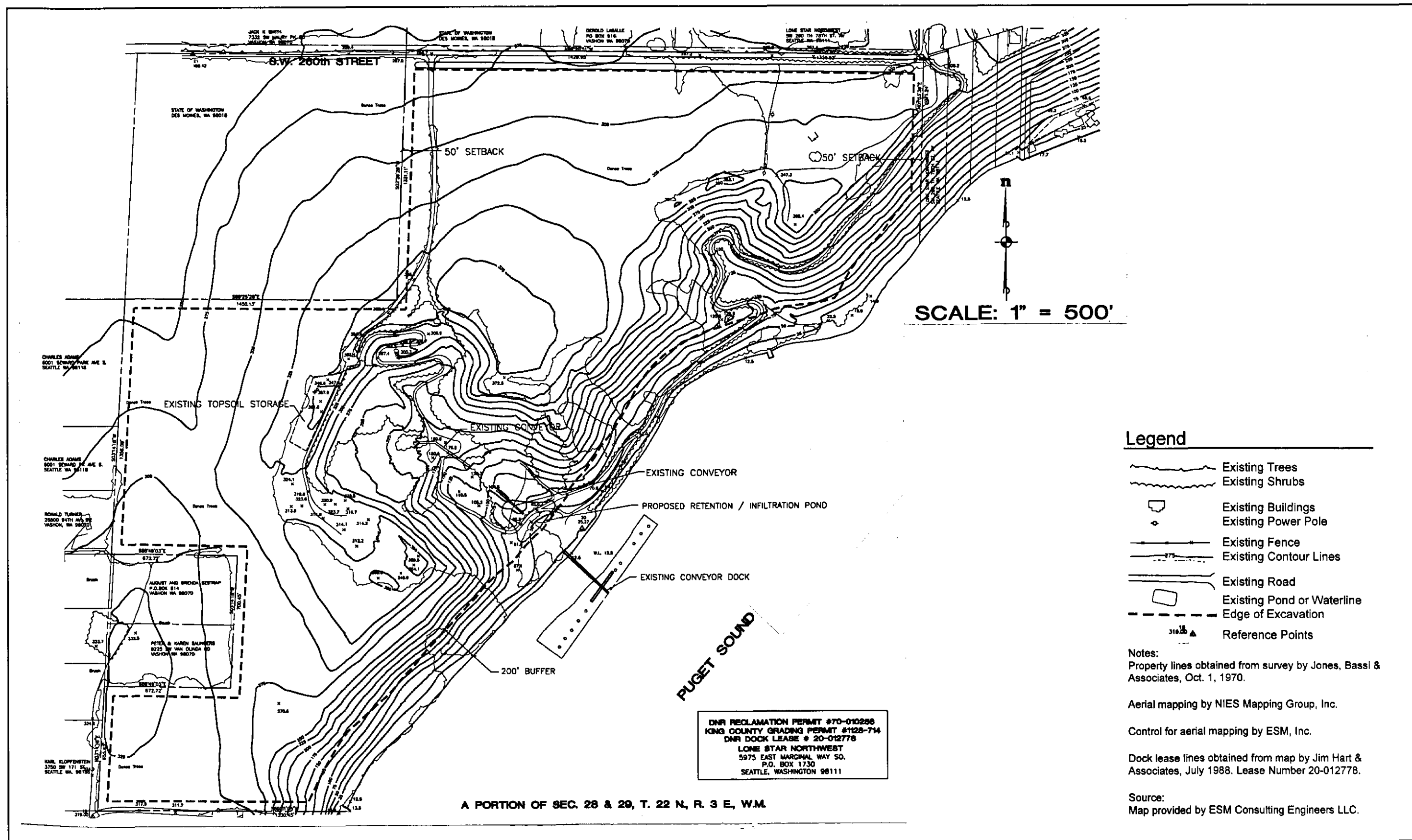


Figure 1-5. Existing Site Conditions